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AUTHOR	Barnett, Lynn; Li, Yong
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ABSTRACT

To determine the extent to which community colleges provide services and programs for students with disabilities, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) conducted a national survey in 1995 of public and private community, technical, and junior colleges in the United States, U.S. territories, and Canada. Fall 1995 headcounts for both full- and part-time students were used as the basis of responses. Information provided by 672 campuses offered a view of the ways that community colleges were responding to the Americans with Disabilities Act. Analysis of that information, coupled with data from the 1992-93 National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey, resulted in the national and program profiles contained in this document. The AACC survey instrument covered nine categories of disabilities: visual impairment, deafness, orthopedic/mobility disabilities, speech/language disorders, learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional/behavioral disorders, head injuries, and chronic illness. Information is provided regarding enrollment/graduation, student registration for disability support services, support services and accommodations, special features of various programs, uses of technology, outreach activities, tracking, and outcomes.(Contains 9 graphs and 15 references) (AS)

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Disability Support Services in Community Colleges

AACC Research Brief

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Lynn Barnett
Yong Li

American Association of Community Colleges

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AACC RESEARCH BRIEF

AACC-RB-97-1

Disability Support Services

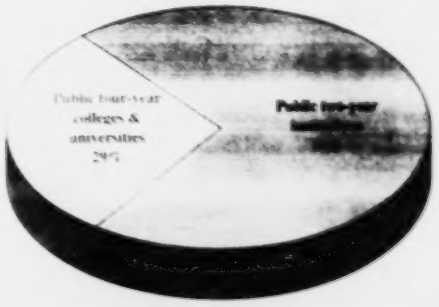
Disability Support Services in Community Colleges

Lynn Barnett and Yong Li

To determine the extent to which community colleges provide services and programs for students with disabilities, the American Association of Community Colleges conducted a national survey in 1995 of public and private community, technical, and junior colleges in the United States, U.S. territories, and Canada. Fall 1995 headcounts for both full-time and part-time students were used as the basis of responses. Information provided by 672 campuses offered a rich view of the ways that community colleges were responding to the Americans with Disabilities Act. Analysis of that information, coupled with data from the 1992–93 National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey, resulted in the following national and program profiles. Among the findings:

- Among all of public postsecondary education, two-year colleges enroll the highest percentage of students with disabilities: 7% percent of all postsecondary students with disabilities.
- Approximately 8 percent of all community college students report having a disability; approximately half of those register for college support services.
- Learning disabilities, orthopedic/mobility disabilities, and chronic illness/other disabilities are the three most prevalent categories of disabilities in community colleges.
- Nearly 80 percent of all campuses have a disability support service office.
- Males and females appear to request disability support services in fairly equal numbers, and the racial or ethnic composition of students with disabilities closely mirrors that of the general population.
- Services most frequently provided by colleges are adaptive equipment or technology; alternative exam formats or time; registration assistance; notetakers, scribes, or readers; a disability support service office; and interpreters for students with hearing impairments.
- Community service connections are made with government and nongovernment rehabilitation agencies, high school counselors, community organizations, advisory boards, businesses, and parent organizations.
- Most colleges do not have formal systems in place to track the outcomes of students with disabilities.

Figure 1. Distribution of Students with Disabilities in Public Institutions of Higher Education



Sources: National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (1992-93 Survey, National Center for Education Statistics, and Community College Services for Students with Disabilities, AACC Survey, 1995.

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The Survey Instrument

The AACC survey instrument solicited information related to the following: disability support service (DSS) staff contacts; enrollment; number of students registered for DSS; degree or certificate attainment; types of disabilities represented by students who request services; services and accommodations offered to those students; special features or programs that the college regards as particularly effective or unusual; technology; outreach activities; and outcomes.

Nine categories of disabilities were surveyed: visual impairment or blindness, deafness/hard of hearing, orthopedic/mobility disabilities, speech/language disorders, learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional/behavioral disorders, head injuries, and chronic illness and other. The 28 types of support services and accommodations about which information was requested are shown below.

- Disability-specific scholarships
- Disability support services office
- Disability resource handbook
- Special orientation
- Registration assistance
- Housing - on campus
- Housing - off campus
- Emergency evacuation
- Transportation
- Extracurricular activities
- Adapted sports/physical education
- Counseling (personal)
- Disability-specific assessment
- Learning center lab
- Interpreters
- Notetakers/scribes/readers
- Taped texts
- Tutoring (specialized LD)
- Alternative exam formats/time
- Course substitution/waiver
- Independent living/social skills training
- Vocational assessment/career counseling
- Job-seeking skills training
- Job placement
- Study skills training
- Self-advocacy training
- Transfer assistance
- Social Security tuition waiver

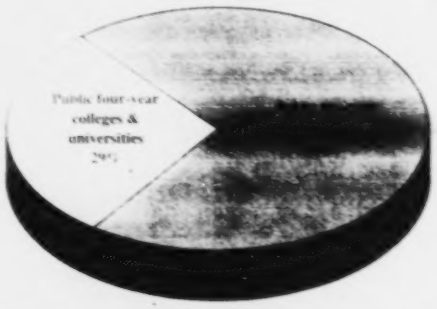
Colleges were asked to identify outreach activities in eight areas: accommodation consultation to business; advisory board; vocational rehabilitation agency (government); vocational rehabilitation agency (non-government); community organization collaboration; high school counselor outreach; parent organization outreach; and other.

In addition, the colleges were asked to provide information on any noteworthy or most valuable features of their programs, as well as any noteworthy assisted technology facilities or equipment available to students with disabilities.

Enrollment/graduation

Among all sectors of public postsecondary education, two-year colleges enroll the highest percentage of students with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Education's 1992–93 National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS) shows that 71 percent of all students with disabilities in public postsecondary institutions are in two-year colleges; 29 percent are in four-year colleges and universities. This represents an 8 percent increase at community colleges since the 1989–90 NPSAS study.

Figure 1. Distribution of Students with Disabilities in Public Institutions of Higher Education



Source: National Postsecondary Student Aid Study 1992–93 Survey, National Center for Education Statistics; also Community College Services for Students with Disabilities, AACC Survey, 1995.

Approximately 8 percent of community college students reported having a disability in 1995, compared with 6 percent in 1992. Half of those reporting disabilities also requested disability support services, compared with one-third requesting services in 1992.

Data on graduate rates for students with disabilities are incomplete. Less than a third of the responding institutions provided data on degree completion by DSS students overall, and less than a fifth reported information on certificate attainment.

Figure 2. Students with Reported Disabilities and Those Using Support Services in Community Colleges

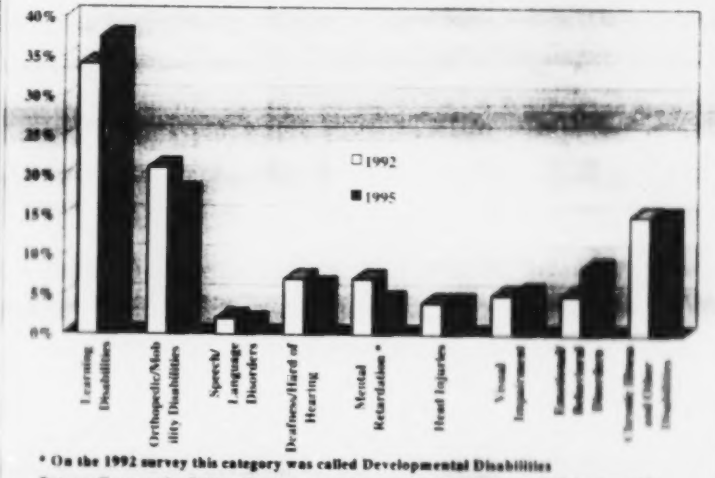
Students Registered for Disability Support Services

Learning disabilities constitute by far the largest single category of disability in community colleges, followed by orthopedic/mobility disabilities and chronic illnesses/other disabilities. Students in all other categories of disabilities are fairly evenly divided, with speech and language disorders the smallest group. The distribution overall has not changed since an AACC survey conducted in 1992.

DSS gender and racial/ethnic information was sought from community colleges for the first time in the 1995 AACC survey. Males and females appeared to request disability support services in fairly equal numbers. Similarly, racial/ethnic composition of DSS students closely mirrored that of the general population.

NOTE: Although the figure for learning disabilities is up slightly since 1992, the increase may be attributed to a change in survey language. The 1992 survey category Developmental Disabilities was more accurately called Mental Retardation in the 1995 instrument; since the 1995 increase in numbers for Learning Disabilities is offset by a comparable decrease in numbers for Mental Retardation, it is possible that learning disabilities were sometimes earlier reported as developmental disabilities.

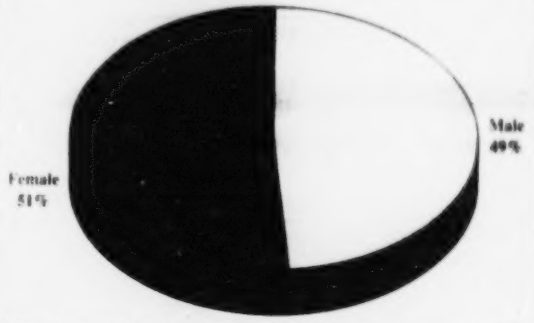
Figure 3. Percent Distribution of Disabilities at Community Colleges: 1992 and 1995



* On the 1992 survey this category was called Developmental Disabilities

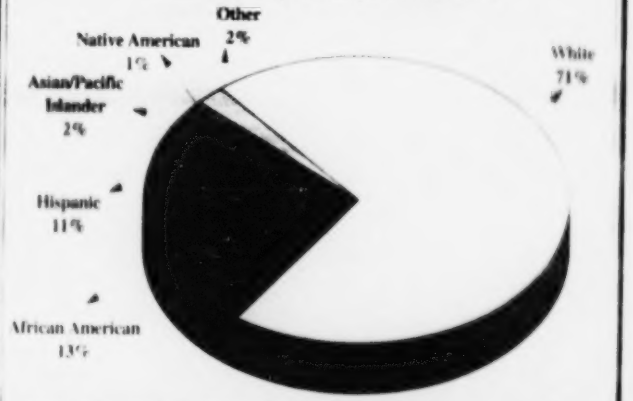
Source: Community College Services for Students with Disabilities, AACC Survey, 1995

Figure 4. Gender Composition of Students Reporting Disabilities



Source: Community College Services for Students with Disabilities, AACC Survey, 1995

Figure 5. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Students Reporting Disabilities



Source: Community College Services for Students with Disabilities, AACC Survey, 1995

Support Services and Accommodations

With the exception of study skills training, a new survey category in 1995, the most prevalent services and accommodations were the same as reported in 1992: adaptive equipment/technology, registration assistance, notetakers/readers/scribes, counseling, alternative exam formats/time, DSS office, interpreters, taped texts, learning center lab, and tutoring. The most dramatic increase was the use of adaptive equipment/technology: more than 30 percent since 1992.

Services and accommodations least frequently provided included disability resources handbooks, emergency evacuation, disability-specific assessment, and extracurricular activities, adaptive sports/physical education, and DSS scholarships.

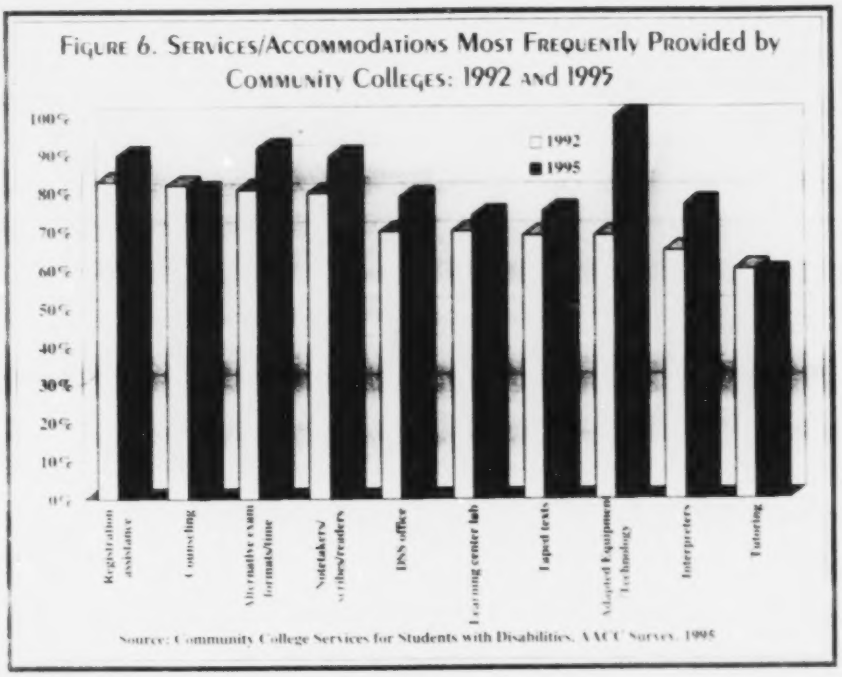


Figure 6. Services/Accommodations Most Frequently Provided by Community Colleges: 1992 and 1995

Source: Community College Services for Students with Disabilities, AACC Survey, 1995

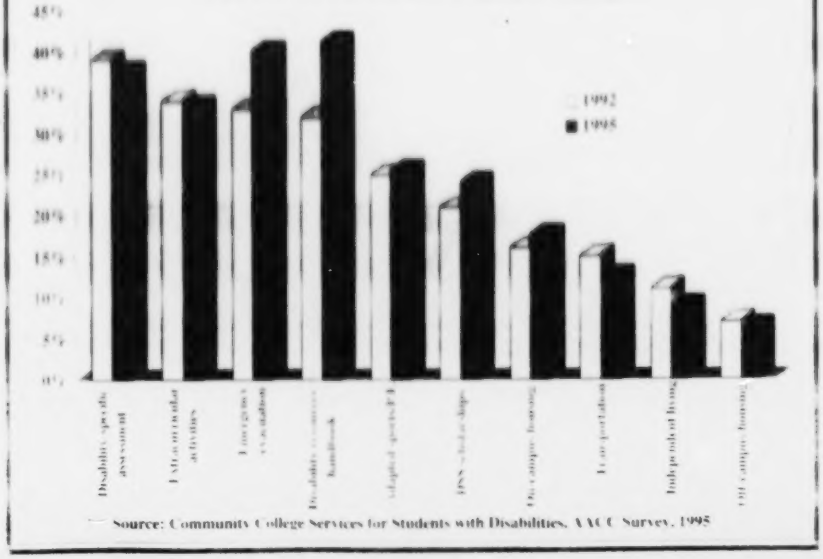


Figure 7. Services/Accommodations Least Frequently Provided by Community Colleges: 1992 and 1995

Source: Community College Services for Students with Disabilities, AACC Survey, 1995

Special Features

Colleges reported a wide range of programs or services that they considered to be noteworthy and that went beyond the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 2973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Among them were large adaptive physical education programs or day care centers, mentoring and job shadowing programs, and international student exchange programs. A number of colleges had DSS student clubs, high tech centers, closed-circuit television, and cooperative education programs.

Technology

Contrary to 1992, when "adapted equipment (phones, computers, etc.)" was included in the list of possible support services and accommodations available to students with disabilities, the 1995 AACC survey asked an open-ended question specifically about the use of technology. Although almost one in three (31 percent) of 1992 respondents did not report having any adapted equipment, nearly every respondent in the 1995 survey listed some kind of special technology.

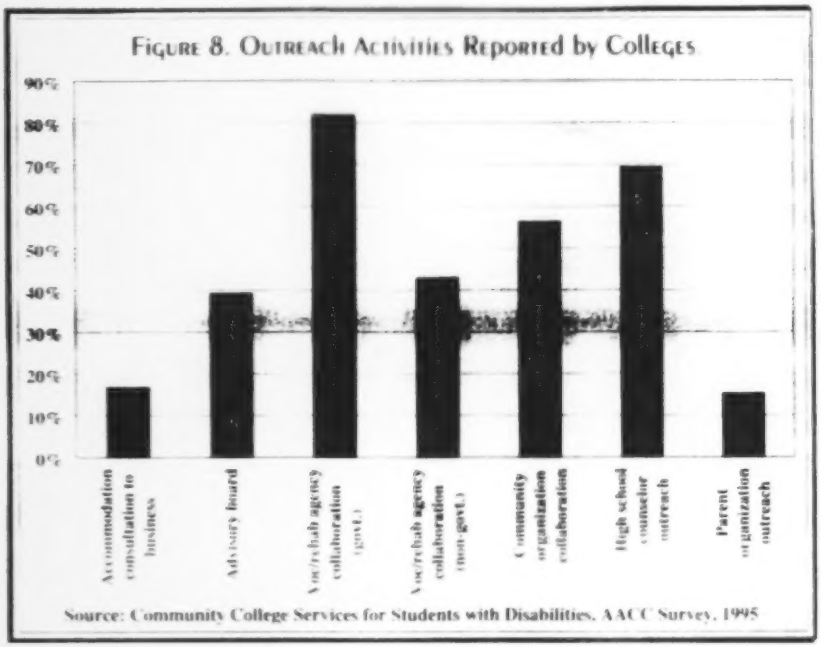
Some statewide high tech centers are also in place. The responses suggested the immense role that computer technology can play in making a college education accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Examples of Technological Services Available

- ★ voice-activated software
- ★ screen magnification software
- ★ FM assisted listening
- ★ closed-circuit TV
- ★ talking calculators
- ★ large screen monitors
- ★ large monitor microscopes
- ★ accessible lab tables
- ★ braille printers
- ★ keyboard adaptations
- ★ large character display
- ★ telesensory technology

Outreach Activities

Community college DSS staff connected their programs and services with others in a variety of ways. By far the most common outreach effort (81.1 percent of respondents) was collaboration with government vocational rehabilitation agencies. In order, the next areas were: high school counselor outreach; collaboration with community organizations; collaboration with non-government vocational rehabilitation agencies; advisory boards; accommodation consultation to business; and parent organization outreach.



Many respondents also indicated many other types of outreach activities. They included: coordination with school districts and other higher education institutions, statewide programs, regional consortia, community transition teams, direct outreach to high school students, public information sessions, open houses or festivals, alumni organizations, publications, community workshops, support groups, professional associations, transition fairs, job fairs, and outreach to medical facilities.

Tracking and Outcomes

According to the AACC survey, many if not most community colleges did know much about what happened to their DSS students once they left the institution. When asked where their students when to work, at least half of the respondents did not answer. Among those who did respond, about a fifth said to "technical" jobs; but nearly another fifth answered "don't know." As for further education, about a fifth indicated that their DSS students went on to four-year colleges and universities. Many respondents simply did not know. This is directly related to the lack of tracking mechanisms in community colleges.

To explore the isue of student tracking, the survey asked respondents the open-ended question, How do you track outcomes of your students with disabilities? The responses suggested that tracking outcomes continues to be problematic. Few institutions had systematic mechanisms in place to track their DSS students after they leave the college. Some tied into statewide information systems. Most community colleges, however, kept track of their DSS students primarily through student records while they were enrolled, and not when they left the institution. Some institutions used a variety of follow-up surveys, some through alumni or job placement offices.

Responses suggested the following approaches to student tracking: student surveys (ranging from 30-day to one or more years after departure); informal methods including word-of-mouth; job placement/career counseling offices; personal contact including telephone, home visits, or letters; student self-reports; exit interviews or questionnaires; or contacts with rehabilitation services. Less frequent approaches include university contacts, transfer records, or employer surveys.

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For further information on the AACC survey results or related information, contact

Lynn Barnett

American Association of Community Colleges

One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 410

Washington, DC 20036-1176

Phone: 202/728-0200, x204

Fax: 202/833-2467

Internet: *lbarnett@aacc.nche.edu*

WWW: *http://www.aacc.nche.edu*

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